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Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions

Assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted in compliance with General Assembly resolution 60/128 on assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa and draws on information received from a number of United Nations organizations. It updates the information contained in the report of the Secretary-General submitted to the Assembly at its sixtieth session (A/60/293) and contains an overview of developments, information about specific areas of inter-agency cooperation and cooperation with regional organizations, efforts to coordinate resources and more detailed regional updates. The period covered is 2005 and the first half of 2006.

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I. Introduction

1. There were a number of encouraging developments and new initiatives during the reporting period. Peace, successfully brokered through a combination of determined African leadership and sustained international support, was further consolidated in several African countries and opportunities maximized for the voluntary, safe and dignified return of large numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) to their places of origin, notably Angola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia and southern Sudan.

2. Efforts to uphold international protection principles continued in cooperation with Governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and regional organizations and with a special focus on how the international community could deliver a more comprehensive, predictable and accountable response to the plight of IDPs.

3. With more than 16 million persons uprooted, Africa remains the continent most affected by forced displacement. The estimated 13 million IDPs represent more than half the world's total IDP population, according to figures from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. There are still 2.6 million refugees in Africa, despite a decrease of 300,000 in 2005. Other populations of concern to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) include more than 238,000 asylum-seekers as well as some 281,000 refugees who returned home in 2005.

4. Volatile situations with a high potential for conflict persist. The steady deterioration in the security situations in the northern Central African Republic, Chad and the Darfur region of the Sudan has triggered the forced displacement of people to safer regions internally and externally to neighbouring countries. In countries such as Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia, violence continued to drive people from their homes.

II. Specific areas of inter-agency cooperation

A. Internally displaced persons

5. Ensuring a more predictable, timely, efficient and effective response to the plight of IDPs was a major thrust of humanitarian reform efforts over the past year, in particular through the adoption of the inter-agency cluster leadership approach. At the global level, it is designed to build up capacity in key "gap" areas, with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee designating global cluster leads. At the field level, the approach aims to strengthen the coordination and response capacity by mobilizing clusters of humanitarian agencies to respond in specific areas of intervention. Accountability is a key feature, with the Humanitarian Coordinator, supported by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, retaining overall responsibility for ensuring the effectiveness of humanitarian response. United Nations agencies and their partners started undertaking those responsibilities in 2006 in the four pilot countries selected by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee: the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Uganda and Somalia.

B. Protection

Respect for international protection principles and strengthening of protection capacity

6. Through the activities of various actors, progress was made in strengthening the international protection regime in Africa. To empower Governments to assume their national responsibility, UNHCR increased its assistance to a number of Governments to strengthen their capacity to conduct refugee status determination, including in Burundi, Malawi and Nigeria. Such efforts will continue in 2006 and beyond to establish functioning, effective and sustainable national refugee status determination procedures. UNHCR also provided advice and guidance to countries which are in the process of drafting or revising national refugee laws, including Angola, the Central African Republic, Guinea, Sierra Leone and the United Republic of Tanzania.

7. The comprehensive approach towards delivering protection of the Strengthening Protection Capacity project, which was piloted in Benin, Burkina Faso, Kenya and United Republic of Tanzania, has proven successful. It resulted in a wide range of projects to address the gaps identified and some donors have made funding available for several of those projects.

8. In addition to specific field deployment schemes with several partners, by June 2006, seven senior protection officers had been deployed in Africa through the inter-agency protection standby capacity established by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in 2005 as a common service to protection-mandated entities to build surge capacity in order to enhance the IDP protection response.

9. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) continued to contribute to the protection of human rights of refugees and IDPs, such as in Liberia, where OHCHR monitored the rights of over half a million returnees and IDPs through the human rights sections of the United Nations Mission in Liberia.

Security of persons of concern and staff security

10. Initiatives to address refugee security issues included: bolstering camp security mechanisms in Chad and Darfur; strengthening partnerships with local authorities, such as in Chad and Côte d'Ivoire; and assisting in the development of conditions for return in southern Sudan. UNHCR and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations continued their staff exchange programme to further operationalize areas of cooperation, such as refugee/returnee security, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, and mine action.

11. Nonetheless, a number of serious security incidents have occurred since the last report. In Darfur, the attack on the Aro Sharo IDP camp in September 2005 claimed the lives of 34 IDPs and villagers. That marked the beginning of a period of steady deterioration in security throughout Darfur and was followed by repeated incidents of harassment of civilians in villages and camps. Continuing attacks on humanitarian convoys eventually compelled the United Nations to upgrade its security phase. In spite of the recent Darfur Peace Agreement, security remains a deep concern in both the Sudan and eastern Chad, where the deteriorating security situation is closely linked to the Darfur crisis. The border area was increasingly at

the centre of tensions. Armed elements on both sides operated with impunity and there were reports of military recruitment in camps in eastern Chad. Attacks in Chadian villages along the border led to internal displacement and refugee influxes to Darfur.

12. Regarding staff safety, several serious incidents were encountered. An attack on a UNHCR compound in southern Sudan in March 2006 caused the death of one UNHCR staff member, the wounding of another and the death of a guard. In the first half of 2006, there were 27 car-jackings in eastern Chad, including a violent attack against a staff member from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). In West Africa, UNHCR staff faced hostile refugee groups and asylum-seekers asking for more assistance or resettlement, leading in some cases to the destruction of property and violent confrontations between the police and the local population.

Registration and documentation

13. UNHCR continued to reinforce its capacity to provide better protection through the implementation of its software application Project Profile, which aims at improving the standards and methodologies for registering and documenting refugees. To date, the application has been installed in 24 operations throughout the continent.

Age, gender and diversity mainstreaming

14. With 29 operations already covered, the roll-out of the age, gender and diversity mainstreaming strategy is expected to be completed for sub-Saharan Africa by the end of 2006. The strategy involves UNHCR and partners undertaking participatory assessments with various refugee groups to jointly identify the major protection risks and strategies for solutions. One of the biggest reported protection challenges is the need to develop livelihood strategies so as to enable persons concerned to live in a dignified manner. Offices are analysing age, gender and diversity mainstreaming findings in order to adapt their plans and resolve problems whenever possible. In Kenya, for instance, a group of women suffering from fistula were identified and provided with health support.

Protection of refugee women

15. Operations continued to dedicate efforts towards fuller implementation of the High Commissioner's five commitments to refugee women. Reports on the Great Lakes and the southern Africa regions show that all countries have made considerable efforts to implement the commitments, but also reveal that significant gaps remain in several areas.

16. Sensitization of women about their rights continues. In Angola, particular progress has been made in empowering women to participate in the forthcoming elections, as voters and as candidates. However, access to food, clothes and secondary education needs to be improved. Efforts continue to close the gaps in those operations where the commitments have not been met.

Prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence

17. In 2005, United Nations agencies and partner staff, together with refugees and Governments, continued to cooperate to promote the prevention of and response to

sexual and gender-based violence through a multisectoral approach. In southern Africa, as a result of a research study conducted on refugee and returnee children's views of violence in 2005 (in Angola, South Africa and Zambia), there has been a major shift in sexual and gender-based violence programming. Children are now more engaged in the identification of protection risks and the design of solutions. In west Darfur, 33 women's centres were established in IDP settlements and villages to allow women to jointly address problems and find peer support.

18. In May 2006, a report based on a study conducted in Liberia by Save the Children-UK in 2005 highlighted widespread sexual exploitation and abuse of children in IDP camps and in communities of return. In response, the United Nations and its partners have developed an action plan to prevent and effectively respond to sexual exploitation and abuse.

Child protection

19. Child protection continued to be strengthened through increased field support, the age, gender and diversity mainstreaming strategy, capacity-building activities and sustained partnership among United Nations organizations, NGOs and host Governments. During participatory assessments with groups of children, it was noted that unaccompanied and separated children require much closer monitoring and follow-up. In Dadaab, Kenya, inter-agency procedures for unaccompanied and separated children were reviewed to ensure a common approach to identification, registration and monitoring; counselling and educational support were also increased.

20. For repatriation movements, spontaneous and organized, protection and care mechanisms were put in place to meet the specific needs of unaccompanied and separated children. UNICEF funded activities to support child protection monitoring during spontaneous returns between north and south Sudan, for instance, by providing childcarers trained to support returnees with special needs.

21. Inter-agency cooperation and the steering committees in East and West Africa and the Horn of Africa continue to advance the objectives of the Action for the Rights of Children programme

22. Forced recruitment of children was reported in refugee camps in Rwanda, where 185 children are suspected to have been recruited by rebel groups of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In eastern Chad, in the camps, there have been several incidents of overt recruitment by Sudanese rebels. While the Chadian Government has been called upon to enforce the civilian character of refugee camps, vocational training, peace education and recreational activities have been developed at the camp level to encourage positive behaviour and prevent youth recruitment. In northern Uganda, where the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) uses girls and boys as child soldiers, UNICEF and partners reunified 626 formerly abducted children with their communities.

Statelessness

23. The magnitude of the phenomenon of statelessness in Africa is not fully known and understanding of the nature of many specific statelessness situations remains incomplete. UNHCR is aware of a number of situations, including in Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Mauritania and Zimbabwe,

where individuals or groups have been deprived of nationality or might be unable to acquire nationality.

24. During voluntary repatriation operations, cases of disputed nationality were reported among returnees in Angola, Burundi and "Somaliland". UNHCR worked in coordination with UNICEF and State institutions in countries such as Guinea-Bissau to reinforce capacity so as to ensure birth registration as a means of preventing statelessness.

25. The past year also saw two positive developments. Senegal acceded to the two international conventions relating to statelessness, while the new Constitution and nationality law of the Democratic Republic of the Congo recognize that all individuals belonging to ethnic and national groups constituting the Congo at the time of independence as well as their descendants are citizens.

C. Durable solutions

Voluntary repatriation and reintegration

26. Garnering the international community's support for reconstruction and rehabilitation remains a challenge to the sustainability of return and the peace process. Inadequate reintegration opportunities lead many refugees to choose to remain in exile or return to locations where their children have better access to education and health care. The pace of return to Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and southern Sudan, for instance, can be sustained only if, in addition to improved security conditions, adequate financial resources are made available to support repatriation and reintegration activities.

27. UNHCR continued to consolidate partnerships with main development actors to ensure a smooth transition between relief and development programmes. Discussions on strengthening the partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) led to an agreement to focus on five countries: Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, the Sudan and Uganda. Similarly, the International Labour Organization (ILO) supported reintegration operations in Angola, Burundi and Liberia through the deployment of technical experts under the ILO-UNHCR Joint Technical Cooperation Programme. In the case of bilateral development agencies, UNHCR continued to strengthen its partnership with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), in particular in the area of vocational training, with the Sudan identified as a priority.

Self-reliance and local integration

28. Progress has been rather modest in terms of local integration throughout the continent. However, some progress was made towards local integration of Somali Bantus in the United Republic of Tanzania. In Guinea, the Government has offered to integrate locally and grant citizenship to remaining Sierra Leonean refugees. Prospects also exist in southern Africa, where refugees have made progress in integrating economically; yet, legally, refugees cannot convert their refugee status to a more permanent status. Specific interventions addressing that problem will be designed and implemented starting in 2006.

29. Activities were undertaken to improve the livelihoods and self-reliance opportunities of refugees. The ILO-UNHCR Technical Cooperation Programme was

utilized in Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Ethiopia and Kenya. In southern Chad, ILO and UNHCR deployed an ILO expert to design a sustainable livelihoods project that concentrates on the promotion of crop production and income-generating activities to better ensure the food security of Central African refugees.

30. The "Zambia Initiative", based on the concept of development through local integration of refugees, was evaluated by a team of independent consultants in late 2005. The findings and recommendations are being used to improve the management and implementation of the initiative and will feed into its possible extension to other provinces hosting refugees in Zambia.

Resettlement to third countries

31. Resettlement continued to be a valuable protection tool as well as a durable solution for refugees in many countries, including Kenya, Burundi, Ghana, Ethiopia, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia. In 2005, more than 16,700 refugees were resettled from 28 countries in Africa. While the submission of refugees on an individual basis continued, three groups were submitted for resettlement, including 700 survivors of the 2004 massacre in the Gatumba transit centre in Burundi.

D. Delivery of assistance and special needs

Use of standards and indicators

32. While some progress was noted in some cases, there are still significant gaps with regard to achieving UNHCR standards in many sectors of assistance, including nutrition, health, education, water and sanitation. Substantial numbers of refugees in protracted situations endure the cumulative adverse effects of recurrent shortfalls on levels of basic protection and assistance services. Those constraints make it difficult to safeguard even core activities. Impact reports cite the inability to print refugee identity cards and a reduction in the construction of shelter and sanitary facilities.

Food and nutrition

33. UNHCR and the World Food Programme (WFP) continued to intensify their collaboration at every level to meet the needs of refugees, returnees and IDPs. Thirteen joint assessment missions and three training sessions to improve the quality of the missions were conducted as part of the WFP/UNHCR joint work plan. UNHCR and WFP are extending their cooperation to include IDPs and have established a High-level Working Group on IDPs to see how existing WFP/UNHCR procedures for refugees can be adapted to IDP situations.

34. Joint advocacy initiatives attempted to address the funding crisis and its impact on the delivery of assistance to displaced persons. Funding constraints forced WFP to reduce food rations for refugees, IDPs and returnees in countries such as Angola, Chad, Guinea, Kenya, Sierra Leone, the Sudan (Darfur region), the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia. Some donations eased the crisis, but the situation remains precarious in many protracted refugee and IDP situations. The heads of WFP, UNICEF and UNHCR undertook a joint mission in March 2006 to Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda to bring attention to the needs of IDPs, refugees and returnees in the Great Lakes region.

35. In 2005, following nutrition situation analysis and field assessments, nutrition became one of the top priorities of UNHCR. Special emphasis was given to addressing the deteriorating nutrition situation of children and women in some refugee operations, including in Chad, Ethiopia and Kenya, where the acute malnutrition prevalence was above 15 per cent. Joint UNHCR/WFP strategic activities included the analysis of causes and consequences of the poor nutrition situation in those countries, as well as in the United Republic of Tanzania, and the development of nutrition strategies in Ethiopia and Kenya. Nutrition and HIV/AIDS programming strategies were integrated in Zambia and Uganda in collaboration with WFP and UNICEF. WFP is also giving added focus to food quality in order to prevent micronutrient deficiencies, one of the significant factors contributing to high malnutrition rates. UNICEF and WFP, with other partners, are collaborating to end child hunger through a global initiative to reduce by half the people who suffer from hunger by 2015, as targeted in the Millennium Development Goals.

Education

36. Education programmes are in place in all operations in Africa and are implemented by over 100 local and international organizations and Governments. From countries of asylum and IDP settlements to areas of return, activities have been carried out to meet the education needs of children affected by forced displacement and to prepare for a smooth return to their places of origin. A pilot project in West Africa for over 3,000 Liberian adolescent refugee girls and boys was initiated to address protection risks and provide marketable skills to facilitate reintegration upon return to Liberia. In IDP camps in the Sudan, UNICEF and Save the Children-UK have supported the training of IDP teachers in preparation for the move to southern Sudan, where UNICEF has led efforts to support the resumption of basic education for returned displaced children. In other repatriation operations, including Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, there is an urgent need to support the efforts to rehabilitate school facilities in order to sustain the repatriation of refugees who hesitate to return as a result of poor education services compared to refugee settlements.

37. To encourage displaced, refugee and returnee children to attend school, WFP school feeding programmes have been implemented in Ethiopia for the benefit of refugee children, in Liberia for returned IDP children and in Angola, where the programme is implemented in provinces with high percentages of returnee populations.

38. In countries of asylum, in addition to ensuring the right of refugee children to primary education, efforts were made to support access to secondary and higher education, including through specifically sponsored grant and scholarship programmes. At the tertiary level, 741 refugee youth from 20 African countries benefited from Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative Fund (DAFI) scholarships. Girls' secondary education scholarship programmes continue in Ghana and Uganda.

39. Severe cuts owing to chronic financial shortfalls have seriously affected the capacity of UNHCR to support basic education programmes. In some instances, those cuts resulted in the suspension or decrease of secondary education programmes and a severe reduction of primary education activities, including in the

Congo and Zambia, thus increasing protection risks and exposure to labour and sexual exploitation.

Health

40. In 2006, malaria, safe motherhood and HIV/AIDS became part of the health-related priorities of UNHCR. The Strategic Plan for Malaria Control (2005-2007) was launched to ensure that refugees have access to effective prevention, diagnosis and treatment as well as to ensure that repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes in Africa include malaria control. The Inter-agency Health Evaluations in Humanitarian Crises initiative, spearheaded by the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNHCR, have been completed in Chad and Liberia and reference guidelines have been formulated. Ethiopia and Kenya were the countries targeted in Africa to roll out the Integrated Management of Childhood Illness approach in the camps. UNHCR continued to work in partnership with the Centres for Disease Control on the development and roll-out of a standardized health information system in the United Republic of Tanzania, Kenya and Ethiopia in order to improve health-care response and delivery to refugees.

41. Sister United Nations agencies, ministries of health and other partners continued to cooperate in support of health-sector rehabilitation in repatriation operations. Health-care assistance is also provided in refugee programmes and for the benefit of IDPs. UNICEF and partners provided emergency support to meet the most acute needs in health care to a large Congolese IDP population and their host communities in central Katanga and South Kivu provinces, which are characterized by chronic insecurity.

42. Regional joint reproductive health initiatives, supported notably by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), have included medical care and education for Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone, fistula surgery for Sudanese and local women in Chad and comprehensive reproductive health projects in the Sudan.

HIV and AIDS

43. Ensuring that the human rights of people living with HIV/AIDS are duly respected and combating the spread of the HIV virus among refugees, returnees and IDPs remained high among the priorities of United Nations agencies and partners. Advocacy efforts for the inclusion of refugees, returnees and IDPs in national strategic policies and programmes on HIV/AIDS were sustained, notably in southern Africa. UNHCR recently published and distributed a cartoon booklet targeting youth in Africa to promote a discrimination-free environment for refugees and returnees.

44. UNFPA and UNHCR developed a project, with WHO technical support, to include post-exposure prophylaxis to prevent transmission of HIV to rape survivors in existing sexual and gender-based violence programmes in refugee settings. UNFPA also provided a contribution to UNHCR for the purchase and distribution of condoms for the benefit of refugees, returnees and IDPs in 16 countries in Africa to help prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS and to strengthen protection against unwanted pregnancies.

45. The World Bank, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and UNHCR continued to work closely in the framework of the Great

Lakes Initiative on AIDS. Other regional initiatives, such as the Mano River Union Initiative on HIV/AIDS and the Initiative des pays riverains des fleuves Congo, Oubangui et Chari, included refugees in their programme activities. The members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Force on HIV/AIDS in Emergency Settings developed a training guide for HIV/AIDS in emergencies and continued with the training and promotion of the guidelines on HIV/AIDS interventions.

E. Cooperation with regional organizations

46. African regional and subregional organizations continued to work with United Nations agencies to strengthen the protection of displaced persons and the search for durable solutions. Four major meetings were held: the African Union Ministerial Conference on Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons in Africa, in Ouagadougou, in May/June 2006; the Intergovernmental Authority on Development Ministerial Conference on Refugees, Returnees and IDPs, in Nairobi, in February 2006; the Southern African Development Community (SADC)/UNHCR meeting on effective refugee protection in SADC, in Botswana, in August 2005; and the joint UNHCR/Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Regional Experts meeting on Durable Solutions in West Africa, in Accra, in May 2005. In addition, UNHCR co-organized two regional seminars: Internal Displacement in the Southern African Development Community, with SADC/Brookings Institution, in August 2005; and Internal Displacement in West Africa, with ECOWAS/Brookings Institution, in April 2006.

47. United Nations agencies remained fully involved in the African Union's New Partnership for Africa's Development programme. UNHCR continued to function as the secretariat of the United Nations sub-cluster on humanitarian response and post-conflict recovery. With the critical support of JICA, UNHCR initiated a project to compile preliminary analyses on post-conflict recovery and reconstruction in 14 countries to identify critical needs and gaps in past and ongoing interventions. Reports on Angola, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia and the Sudan have been completed.

F. Coordination of resources

48. The consolidated inter-agency appeals process continued to be an important tool for coordination and strategic planning in complex emergencies and natural disasters in Africa. For 2006, organizations in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee developed 15 consolidated appeals for crises in Africa, with coordinated humanitarian action plans requiring US$ 4.3 billion. Additionally, a shorter-term flash appeal was launched for Guinea-Bissau.

49. Financial tracking by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of donor response to the appeals showed that by mid-June 2006, the overall funding for those appeals varied from 15 to 52 per cent of requirements. The majority of appeals (including the Horn of Africa, the Sudan, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Congo, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, the Central African Republic and Liberia) did not reach the 40 per cent funding rate. The lack of timely, adequate and predictable funding continued to affect the ability of humanitarian agencies to respond promptly and effectively to the needs of affected populations.

50. Launched in March 2006, the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) is an additional important tool to provide rapid funding to new emergencies and to support chronically underfunded crises. CERF has received $221 million in paid or committed funding, plus another $42 million in uncommitted donor pledges (as of 3 July 2006). It has disbursed or committed $52 million to date to new or chronic crises. In addition, in keeping with the spirit of the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative, the Common Humanitarian Fund for the Sudan and the Pooled Fund for the Democratic Republic of the Congo continued to provide vital support to implementing agencies by channelling funds quickly to the neediest programmes.

51. As part of continued inter-agency efforts to improve the consolidated appeals process, needs assessments and strategic monitoring became more explicit and standardized. In 2005 and 2006, the new needs analysis framework was extended to Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire and Uganda.

III. Regional overviews

A. East Africa and the Horn of Africa

52. With over 6 million people displaced by conflict, the Sudan remained at the heart of the international community's attention, particularly the situation in Darfur and its effects in neighbouring Chad.[1] In another development, the severe drought in East Africa and the Horn of Africa has affected an estimated 5.5 million persons who face critical food shortages, causing additional population movements, including some towards refugee settlements in Kenya.

53. In Somalia, the emergence of the Islamic Courts Union in June 2006 in Mogadishu and environs has weakened the position of the Transitional Federal Government. The international community has urged both parties to restore dialogue. In addition, Eritreans continued to arrive at a steady pace in Ethiopia and the Sudan, in part as a result of the tensions between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

54. In that context, the launching of the facilitated repatriation operation to southern Sudan in December 2005 is a major positive development. Also of particular note is the return of some 32,000 Eritrean IDPs since February 2005 to their places of origin, through a return and rehabilitation programme initiated jointly by the Government and United Nations agencies.

The Sudan

55. Following the signing of the Peace Agreement between the Government of the Sudan and the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) in early 2005, several hundred thousand IDPs and refugees are estimated to have returned voluntarily and spontaneously to southern Sudan.

56. In response, tripartite agreements were signed between UNHCR, the Government of Southern Sudan and most neighbouring countries of asylum, establishing the legal framework for repatriation to southern Sudan. Those agreements have guided the facilitated return of over 10,000 refugees since

[1] Information regarding Chad is included in section C below on Central Africa and the Great Lakes region.

December 2005, mostly from the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia and Uganda. In countries of asylum, refugees have been registered and verified for return. Vocational training has also been expanded to prepare refugees for repatriation. Sensitization campaigns, including mine-risk and health-risk education, have been organized for IDPs and refugees to ensure the safety and voluntary nature of returns.

57. In addition to ongoing humanitarian programmes in areas of displacement, humanitarian agencies provided assistance to returning refugees and IDPs during their journey back home and in safe areas of return. Along the routes of return, UNICEF and its partners provided clean water in way stations to assist spontaneous IDP returnees on their way home.

58. In southern Sudan, humanitarian actors continued to allocate resources to create conditions conducive to sustainable return in sectors such as physical protection, water, sanitation, education, livelihoods and community infrastructure. Non-food items were pre-positioned for returnees. WFP support for the return and reintegration of refugees and IDPs in the Sudan includes food rations and support to activities designed to mitigate the pressure on resident communities and thus contribute to the establishment of a positive environment for returnees. Over 100 community-based reintegration projects benefiting returnees and receiving communities were implemented through 18 NGO partners. In April 2006, the Government of Southern Sudan launched with UNICEF the "Go to School" initiative aimed at putting 1.6 million children in school by the end of 2007 and restoring school buildings.

59. The situation in Darfur continued to pose major challenges to the humanitarian community at large, despite a sense of optimism during the first half of 2005 when an estimated 20,000 persons returned spontaneously to their villages of origin. The Abuja peace agreement between the Government of the Sudan and the largest faction of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) was signed at a time when security in many parts of Darfur, especially west Darfur, has steadily deteriorated since September 2005.

60. United Nations agencies continued to advocate for the reduction of human suffering in Darfur. With more than 13,000 humanitarians from 84 NGOs and Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies and 13 United Nations agencies, the humanitarian presence continued to increase in 2005 to cover the basic needs of 3.6 million persons in Darfur, including 1.8 million IDPs. UNICEF provided access to clean water and sanitation services to over 2.4 million persons. In the first half of 2006, Darfur accounted for 70 per cent of the average 3 million beneficiaries reached per month by WFP under its operation in the Sudan. UNHCR continued to coordinate protection and camp management activities and introduced small-scale community-based reintegration projects to help the spontaneous returnees reintegrate in their communities in west Darfur.

61. The gains made through such provisions of humanitarian aid have, however, slowly diminished as security and funding constraints have prompted the downsizing of the UNHCR operation in west Darfur by almost half in 2006. In north Darfur, the ongoing conflict prevented UNICEF from accessing over 100,000 IDPs and 71,000 conflict-affected people in host communities.

62. About 30 to 40 Eritreans continued to arrive on a daily basis in eastern Sudan, which already hosts over 120,000 Eritrean refugees in camps. With the overstretching of already limited resources, a new strategy was put in place to accentuate self-reliance and food security. Implemented jointly by UNDP, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the World Conservation Union and UNHCR, the Sustainable Options for Livelihood Security in Eastern Sudan (SOLSES) programme was re-adjusted to enhance its impact on refugees, local communities and host areas.

63. Severe restrictions of movement for all foreign organizations continued in Kassala state. Some United Nations staff members were denied access and others were requested to leave the area. The consequences of the lack of humanitarian access to that region, which is already affected by chronic underdevelopment and widespread poverty, are serious and have severely impacted the ability of the United Nations to provide effective protection and assistance.

Somalia

64. Despite relative peace and stability in north-west and north-east Somalia for some years, the situation in central and southern Somalia remained fluid, thus preventing the return of 235,000 refugees to those regions. UNHCR continued to facilitate the return of refugees mainly to "Somaliland" and "Puntland" and small numbers to Mogadishu, with a total number of returns of 11,900 for 2005. The proposed Comprehensive Plan of Action, which seeks to provide effective durable solutions for Somali refugees, returnees and IDPs, is being reviewed in light of recent developments in Somalia. Mounting tensions in Somalia between the Supreme Council of the Islamic Courts and the Transitional Government raised fears of large scale military confrontations that could possibly cause displacement of people within Somalia and into neighbouring countries, in particular Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda. Already some 20,000 Somalis have crossed into Kenya since the beginning of 2006 owing to drought and conflict.

65. Despite the efforts of humanitarian agencies and NGOs, the most basic humanitarian needs of the estimated 350,000 to 400,000 displaced persons are still not fully met in all sectors, including some areas of protection. That is partly the result of insufficient capacity and presence to undertake adequate relief and recovery efforts, high levels of insecurity and lack of clear authority. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is leading an advocacy effort to engage a wider range of actors in Somalia.

Uganda

66. Displacement, poverty and heightened violence owing to the 20-year-old armed conflict between the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) and LRA continue to spur a severe humanitarian crisis in northern Uganda. The conflict has displaced an estimated 1.5 million persons from their homes into camp settlements, where the rights to access basic health care, safe water, primary education, protection and shelter are largely unrealized.

67. Humanitarian protection strategies have been strengthened following the introduction of the cluster leadership approach with an emphasis on the promotion of freedom of movement for affected populations in northern Uganda and support for the return of IDPs to home areas. The Office for the Coordination of

Humanitarian Affairs estimates that 350,000 persons have returned home from 2005 until mid-2006 in the Lango, Teso and Acholi subregions as a result of greater freedom of movement.

68. Following military activity in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, some 20,000 Congolese fled to Uganda in January 2006. The majority returned, but 5,000 persons remain and receive protection and assistance in camps. In recent months, several hundred refugees have arrived in Uganda, citing insecurity and lack of food and education facilities as reasons for leaving southern Sudan. Those new arrivals add to the 207,000 refugees, mainly from southern Sudan, already hosted by Uganda.

B. West Africa

69. With significant improvements in the humanitarian situation in the Mano River Union countries, the overall number of refugees decreased in West Africa to 377,000, compared to 465,000 in 2004. As the situation continued to stabilize in Sierra Leone, some 272,000 Sierra Leonean returnees benefited from a fourth and final year of UNHCR-led reintegration support, consisting of 700 community empowerment projects. In Sierra Leone, like in most West African countries, the socio-economic situation remained a major concern. In a context of extreme poverty and massive youth unemployment, it is extremely difficult for many displaced persons to settle locally or to reintegrate in their place of origin without the international community's support.

Côte d'Ivoire

70. The situation continued to raise concerns, especially in the western part of the country, where in Guiglo, in January 2006, United Nations peacekeepers and humanitarian staff were forced to leave the town and suspend activities temporarily after organized violence erupted.

71. Elsewhere in the country, the plight of an estimated 709,000 IDPs remained a major concern for the humanitarian community. In late 2005, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs coordinated the undertaking of an IDP survey to analyse the assistance and protection needs of IDPs and host families in five priority areas. In March 2006, the Humanitarian Coordinator asked UNHCR to chair an IDP protection cluster to further enhance the operational response to the protection needs of the displaced persons.

72. Neighbouring countries also continue to be adversely affected by the ongoing Ivorian crisis and many of the large numbers of ECOWAS nationals who have been expelled or fled from Côte d'Ivoire since 2002-2003 are yet to be fully integrated in their countries of origin.

Guinea-Bissau

73. Armed confrontations in March and April 2006 on the western part of Guinea-Bissau's border with Senegal led to the forced displacement of some 10,000 persons within Guinea-Bissau and some 2,500 persons into Senegal at the peak of the crisis. The displaced persons are hosted by local communities with the support and protection of humanitarian actors.

Liberia

74. In the reporting period, more than 70,000 Liberian refugees chose to return under the auspices of UNHCR, mainly from Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Sierra Leone, while an estimated 200,000 returned spontaneously. Furthermore, some 314,000 IDPs were assisted by the Government, United Nations and NGOs to return to their places of origin.

75. The decision taken by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in February 2006 to shift from facilitating to promoting the return of refugees, based on a significant improvement in the situation following the inauguration of the new administration in Liberia, impacted positively on the rate of return. However, the very limited availability of basic services remained a disincentive. In an effort to deal with that concern and bridge the transition gap, UNDP, UNICEF, WFP, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and UNHCR have developed a joint action plan for community-based recovery and restoration of social services in Liberia. The plan provides an integrated framework for harmonizing programme interventions and supports the transition from relief and humanitarian interventions to longer-term goals based on recovery and development objectives. It is foreseen that the return movement will accelerate as the situation continues to improve in Liberia. The ability of the international community to enhance its support to reconstruction efforts will be key to the success of the peace process started in 2003, as will the implementation of the humanitarian reform cluster approach.

Togo

76. Political violence in April 2005 led to the exodus of nearly 40,000 refugees to Benin and Ghana where they received assistance and protection. A recent verification exercise in both asylum countries established that the registered refugee population has significantly decreased. It is presumed that many refugees have returned to Togo spontaneously, while some might have moved to other African countries. The Togolese authorities have launched many initiatives to encourage the return of the refugees and are said to have made a "significant step" in the process of resolution during the inter-Togolese dialogue in May 2006. UNHCR in Benin has assisted a few individuals willing to return and will facilitate voluntary repatriation more proactively once conditions in Togo so permit.

C. Central Africa and the Great Lakes region

77. While advances have been made in the subregion of Central Africa and the Great Lakes, in particular on the political front, regular security incidents in Burundi, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo illustrate the fragility of the peace, which calls for sustained vigilance and advocacy by the international community.

Burundi

78. Although the peace process is still fragile, improved security in most parts of the country allowed UNHCR to facilitate the return of refugees to 13 of 17 provinces. In July 2006, the number of returnees reached 300,000 since the beginning of the facilitated repatriation in 2002, the majority returning with

UNHCR assistance. The pace of return reached a peak after the inauguration of the new President in August 2005, to reach more than 66,000 returnees for 2005. Nevertheless, it slowed down considerably in the first half of 2006 for various reasons, in particular food shortages, which the Government and WFP addressed through food distribution to up to 2 million needy persons in the first months of 2006. In June 2006, UNHCR agreed to move from the facilitation to the promotion of voluntary repatriation in order to encourage Burundian refugees to repatriate. The full pace of return can only be expected once all parties have signed the peace agreement. Sustained attention is required to increase the absorption capacity of areas of return through rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts and to address land and property issues.

79. UNHCR, in cooperation with the Government and partners, continues to provide protection and assistance to 23,000 refugees, mainly from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Moreover, the Office has strengthened its capacity to assist the Government in determining the refugee status of more than 19,000 Rwandan asylum-seekers scattered in northern Burundi since early April 2005. The majority of asylum-seekers decided to return home voluntarily after the Government released in April 2006 the first results of the exercise, indicating a recognition rate of only 5 per cent.

Central African Republic

80. In northern Central African Republic, repeated attacks on the civilian population by bandits and rebels, and subsequent military actions by the national army, caused displacement both internally and into Chad. The estimated 50,000 IDPs are in a dire humanitarian situation as a result of years of precarious living conditions and poverty. It is likely that the problem will continue and possibly worsen as the security situation may deteriorate further.

81. Against that background, the United Nations country team agreed to undertake emergency humanitarian interventions bringing together United Nations agencies and NGOs to alleviate the suffering of IDPs. UNICEF, WFP and WHO, in collaboration with several local and international NGOs and with support from UNHCR and UNDP, have started an emergency assistance programme, with distribution of medicines to health facilities as well as food and non-food items to persons with specific needs.

Chad

82. The humanitarian situation has deteriorated owing to increased insecurity within Chad and in northern Central African Republic and continued insecurity in Darfur. Insecurity in northern Central African Republic has triggered the displacement of 18,000 persons to southern Chad, bringing the total number of Central African refugees to 48,000 and necessitating the opening of a third camp in December 2005. Significant logistical difficulties linked to the remoteness and poor infrastructure have hampered the provision of assistance and protection.

83. Security is increasingly the single greatest preoccupation in eastern Chad. The recent overt recruitment of refugees in camps by Sudanese rebel groups undermines the civilian character of the camps, creating significant risks for the camps to become a target for military action. Though insecurity resulted in the evacuation of non-essential staff, assistance continued to be provided to the 207,000 Sudanese

refugees from Darfur living in 12 camps. Nonetheless, the refugees are in a precarious situation owing to the lack of opportunities for large-scale subsistence agriculture, the scarcity of firewood and the lack of access to sufficient and potable water. In addition, increased pressure over land and natural resources is eroding the receptivity of the Chadians towards the refugees. To address that specific issue, UNHCR dedicated $2.5 million to projects in favour of local populations and WFP made provisions to assist host communities through food-for-work programmes.

84. The spillover of the conflict from Darfur has also sparked growing displacement in eastern Chad since late 2005. In addition to 15,000 Chadians who fled to Darfur, where a refugee camp has been opened to provide assistance to some 3,500 of them, some 50,000 Chadians have been displaced from their eastern border villages owing to attacks allegedly perpetrated by Sudanese and Chadian Janjaweed militia. The humanitarian community, guided by the cluster leadership approach, agreed on a common strategy to meet the most pressing needs of those IDPs by supporting host communities.

85. Considering the deterioration of the security situation in Chad and the recent attack of rebels on N'djamena, United Nations agencies have prepared a common contingency plan factoring in several potential scenarios, in consultation with country teams and NGOs in the Sudan, the Central African Republic and Cameroon.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

86. Developments in the democratic process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2005, including the adoption of the Constitution in December, helped to create an environment conducive to refugee return and reintegration. That brought new impetus to repatriation movements of Congolese refugees from the Central African Republic and the Republic of the Congo and allowed UNHCR to open an additional repatriation corridor in October 2005 from the United Republic of Tanzania to South Kivu province. About half of the 62,000 refugees who returned were assisted by UNHCR. However, the pace of repatriation can be sustained only if security is maintained in the east of the country and adequate financial resources are made available. The same conditions will determine the time frame for the initiation of facilitated movements of Congolese refugees from Zambia to Katanga province.

87. Despite those positive developments, violence continues to create a cycle of displacement, notably in the east. Since the beginning of 2006, more than 71,000 vulnerable families, of which 96 per cent were displaced owing to military operations or armed conflicts, have been assisted through the rapid response mechanism co-managed by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and UNICEF, notably in the provinces of Central Katanga, Orientale (Ituri) and the Kivus. In response to the continuing internal displacements in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, much of which has taken place in areas hard to access, WFP pre-positioned food stocks through an airdrop operation in central Katanga in April and May 2006.

88. In addition to an estimated 1.6 million IDPs, there are some 1.6 million persons who have returned from displacement. The majority of them are women, youth and children who require special measures for their reintegration. To better address the needs of IDPs, it was also decided to roll out the cluster approach in the Democratic Republic of the Congo as of January 2006. Nine clusters plus a coordination cluster are in place. The protection cluster now brings together all main

United Nations and NGO actors for maximum impact in the protection of civilians. That has allowed the development of a common advocacy policy on protection issues, including sexual and gender-based violence and child protection.

D. Southern Africa

89. In 2005, there were a number of positive developments, such as the marked decrease in the numbers of persons of concern to UNHCR in southern Africa and the return of 53,700 Angolan refugees from neighbouring countries, the majority of whom received assistance from UNHCR.

Angola

90. Organized repatriation of the camp-based population in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Namibia and Zambia ended in December 2005. However, given the large number of refugees remaining in Zambia, a one-year extension of movements from Zambia was agreed upon at the March 2006 Zambia-Angola-UNHCR Tripartite Commission meeting. A time-limited operation to facilitate the return of vulnerable, spontaneously settled Angolan refugees in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia is scheduled to begin later in 2006.

91. In 2005, the Angolan Government, supported by UNHCR, launched the Sustainable Reintegration Initiative, which aims at improving conditions in the isolated regions of return where basic social services are inadequate and economic opportunities are extremely limited. Based on the initiative, ILO and UNHCR prepared in 2006 a proposal for a local economic development programme in Moxico, a province that hosts a significant number of returnees.

Zimbabwe

92. Of particular concern is the impact of the "clean-up" operation decided by the Government of Zimbabwe in May 2005 which, according to the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, resulted in an estimated 700,000 persons losing their homes or their livelihoods, or both. Twelve months later, many of those people remain in need of protection and assistance, including a number of self-reliant, long-established refugees, who were obliged to relocate to Tongogara refugee camp, causing overcrowding and overstretching services.

IV. Conclusions

93. **The stabilization of peace processes and security in some regions enabled displaced persons to return home and allowed UNHCR to plan for a gradual scale-down of operations. However, protracted situations of displacement across the continent necessitate continued efforts and initiatives in order to focus on alleviating the humanitarian consequences of forced displacement on millions of Africans and to address its root causes.**

94. **Access to persons of concern and security, a vital precondition for successful humanitarian operations, continued to be problematic. Access has been denied and obstructed on several occasions. Those constraints call for the cooperation of all concerned to ensure unhindered access to displaced persons.**

95. Firm action is required by Governments, with the assistance of the international community, to ensure the civilian character of refugee camps and to prevent the forced recruitment of refugee children.

96. In addition, the chronic disparity between needs and available resources continued to challenge the ability of United Nations agencies to deliver protection and assistance. Funding predictability, in particular, is crucial to ensure the smooth delivery of assistance and protection to displaced persons.

97. The determination of African Governments for reinforced protection for the displaced persons in Africa was re-emphasized at several expert and high-level regional and subregional meetings. However, commitments for consolidated peace processes, enhanced good governance and conflict prevention need to be translated into concrete actions that lead to successful resolutions and the prevention of displacement.

98. Some promising inter-agency policy and funding initiatives to bring the humanitarian response of the international community more efficiently to displaced persons have been designed and are being implemented. Among them, the application of the cluster leadership approach, while promising, will need to be evaluated soon to draw lessons learned.

99. The international community needs to focus further on the root causes of forced displacement in Africa, which extend beyond human rights violations, poverty and lack of employment prospects. It must also give greater attention to the issue of mixed flows and secondary migration movements within Africa and towards other continents to help prevent thousands of individual tragedies.

100. More action and commitment from all involved is also needed to ensure the sustainability of durable solutions. The pace of return in many refugee operations has been slower than expected. For those returning home, return will not be durable without adequate socio-economic opportunities. In the past year, hundreds of thousands of people have gone home to find little or no infrastructure, no education or health-care facilities, no means of self-sufficiency and no employment or other livelihood opportunities. The risk is a recurrence of conflict and new upheaval — another loop in a cycle of perpetual displacement. The support of all involved is vital to make sure that return home for so many uprooted Africans can be a homecoming with real hope for a peaceful future.